



## MINUTES OF THE LXVII COSAC MEETING

PARIS, FRANCE, 3-5 MARCH 2022

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## **PROCEEDINGS**

IN THE CHAIR: Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*, Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Sénat*.

### **OPENING OF THE LXVII COSAC**

**Welcome speech by Ms Laetitia SAINT-PAUL, Vice-President of the French *Assemblée nationale***

Ms Laetitia SAINT-PAUL, Vice-President of the French *Assemblée nationale*, welcomed the participants, on behalf of President Richard FERRAND. She forcefully expressed the solidarity of the French *Assemblée nationale* with the Ukrainian people and praised the sanctions imposed on Russia. She noted that the Bureau of the *Assemblée nationale* had entrusted her with drafting a report on the priorities of the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU), in which she advocated for a strategic Europe at the service of its citizens. Ms SAINT-PAUL pointed out that the EU had to take a stand on several important issues in order to prepare its future, including when they concerned sovereign domains, such as the economic policy, the defence policy or the spatial development. She added that those policies should be compatible with the Paris agreement for the climate transition.

Then, Ms SAINT-PAUL emphasised that the European Union should keep up with the global economic and strategic race, while maintaining a close link with citizens. She pointed out that national parliamentarians had a special role in bringing together the European lands and public policies. She stated that territorial development should be taken into account in several policies, such as the agricultural policy and the sustainable tourism policy.

Finally, Ms SAINT-PAUL stated that the COSAC meetings were a very adequate forum for exchanging views on how the European Union priorities were perceived, expressing her expectations concerning the two working groups established within this Conference in January. She concluded by saying that the exchange with the French Prime Minister would enable national parliamentarians to be involved in monitoring the priorities of the French Presidency of the EU Council.

### **Adoption of the agenda**

Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*, presented the draft agenda of the LXVII COSAC, which was adopted without amendment.

## **SESSION I – FIRST ASSESSMENT OF FRANCE’S PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Keynote speaker: Mr Jean CASTEX, Prime Minister of France

Mr CASTEX started his intervention by recalling that the first COSAC was held in Paris in November 1989 and that, thirty years later, nobody questioned its importance, since this Conference was at the centre of the democratic functioning of the EU, which was currently facing a historic moment with the war in Ukraine.

The French Prime Minister acknowledged that COSAC meetings were usually an opportunity to present and debate the main achievements of the current Presidency of the EU Council with the European Parliament and with all national Parliaments. However, he indicated that the present moment was not for the Presidency to make such an early assessment, but instead to take action so that the EU would be able to meet this historic moment.

He indicated that the EU had acted with firmness, unity and determination, and expressed his admiration for the courage and dignity of the Ukrainian people and their President Volodymyr ZELENSKY. He reiterated that the EU was at their side by delivering equipment, sending humanitarian convoys, and organising a solidarity mechanism to support the bordering Member States hosting the refugees who were fleeing from the conflict.

Mr CASTEX said that the EU had risen to the crisis by adopting unprecedented sanctions against the Russian Federation, particularly in the economic and financial fields. He recalled that the EU's action had a knock-on effect on third countries such as Switzerland, who decided on the same financial sanctions as the EU, and the United Kingdom, who also applied heavy sanctions against Russia. According to the French Prime Minister, the speed and firmness of the European Union's response may have surprised a number of observers, but it was the response of an international actor who stood up for freedom and against war and oppression.

He said, however, that the jointly agreed sanctions would not be painless for the European economy, since sectors such as agriculture, industry and others could suffer because of their dependence on Russian resources or their exposure to the Russian market. Mr CASTEX said that a European response would be needed to protect the most exposed companies, jobs and the sectors.

Notwithstanding, the French Prime Minister considered that one of the effects of this crisis could be to strengthen the cohesion and unity of the EU. He emphasised that the French Presidency of the EU Council had always sought to preserve the unity of the Union, indicating that the President of the French Republic, Mr Emmanuel MACRON, was committed to ensuring that France acted with its partners in the EU and in NATO. Mr CASTEX said that this cohesion and unity were based on the common values of

democracy, freedom and the right of peoples to self-determination. He recalled that these values were defended by the former President of the European Parliament, David Maria SASSOLI, who would be proud of the EU's unity in this war.

According to the Prime Minister, this crisis would strengthen the ties that unite nations, but was also a reminder of how crucial it was to enhance Europe's sovereignty. He recalled that, already last year, President MACRON had indicated that the construction of a true European sovereignty would be the priority of the French Presidency. Although this statement may have been criticised at the time, Mr CASTEX pointed out that the current situation had proven that this priority was right and adequate. He highlighted that four years ago France had promoted the ambition of a European defence and the creation of the European Defence Fund, by launching the idea of the Strategic Compass project. The crisis in Ukraine had confirmed this need and the pertinence of this approach. The Prime Minister said that the EU had to realise its strength, assume its status as a global player and give itself the means to do so, as peace and stability in the world depended on it.

Mr CASTEX said that the French Presidency was committed to help building this powerful Europe, which could go beyond a vast common market, as it was often referred to. Therefore, he added that the strengthening of the sovereignty of the European Union also meant building a more independent Europe in terms of energy and economy, as the health crisis had also shown. He recalled that the European recovery plan had laid the foundations for a stronger and more independent economic model, but that the EU would have to go further in energy and in the industrial and research fields (environment, health and digital in particular). He indicated that all these subjects would be on the agenda of the European Council summit on 10 and 11 March in Versailles.

The Prime Minister concluded his speech by indicating that the European Union must remain mobilised and act, through diplomacy, sanctions and solidarity with the Ukrainian people and their leaders. He stressed that dialogue must be maintained and that President MACRON was in permanent contact with the Ukrainian President and that he had exchanged views with the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir PUTIN, the day before the present meeting to ask for an immediate halt to the fighting.

Mr CASTEX said that this dialogue was hard, difficult and demanding, but that the European Union had to pursue it, whatever the cost, until a ceasefire was achieved. He recalled that France had assumed the responsibility of the EU Council Presidency, but that this was a collective endeavor. He noted that this would also be the purpose of this COSAC meeting: keeping these exchanges showed the cohesion and durability of the European institutions, which were based on parliamentary democracy, of which the national Parliaments and the European Parliament were the main pillars. The Prime Minister recalled that all the participants to this COSAC were the custodians of universal suffrage and of the sovereignty of the peoples, beyond their diversity, which is the wealth of the European Union. He expressed his deep respect and appreciation for them at this serious time, in which the EU must show its unity.

During the ensuing debate, 17 speakers took the floor, expressing support and solidarity with Ukraine and the sanctions against the Russian Federation. They also expressed general support to the French Presidency concerning its role in this crisis and its priority relating to the strategic autonomy of the EU.

Most of the speakers welcomed the unity of the European Union in this crisis and recalled the need for EU autonomy in energy, economic and defence matters.

Mr Markus TÖNS, German *Bundestag*, appreciated that the EU had shown cohesion in this crisis. He said that European sovereignty was necessary, and that it was on the right track with the Strategic Compass project. He pointed out that the European Union needed a well organised defence and diplomacy. Mr Norbert KLEINWÄCHTER, German *Bundestag*, highlighted the fact that the European Union had been divided on many issues such as migration and COVID but had shown unity in the Ukrainian crisis, as the fundamental values of the European Union were at stake.

Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat*, said that the lessons learned from the health crisis should now be applied in terms of resilience and solidarity. The Ukrainian crisis reminded us of the importance of the values of the European Union and of strategic autonomy. Similarly, Mr Dario STEFANO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, said that the EU had shown its solidarity during the COVID crisis and was now showing that it knew how to react. Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, mentioned that the pandemic and the crisis in Ukraine had highlighted the importance of EU unity. In his view, strategic autonomy should be strengthened to meet these challenges, in particular through the Strategic Compass.

Mr Georgios KOUMOUTSAKOS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, emphasized that the European Union should send a strong signal to Ukraine, and play an important role in the political arena and the defence of its values. Similarly, Ms Isabel MEIRELLES, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, welcomed the EU's decisive and swift reaction, and indicated the need to reflect on strategies to make the EU sovereign, especially in terms of defence.

Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, stated that she was pleased that the French Prime Minister had recalled that the European Union must free itself from its energy dependence on Russia.

Mr Evangelos-Vasileios MEIMARAKIS, European Parliament, mentioned the support of the EP to France in this crisis in Ukraine, and in standing up for EU values. He considered it necessary for the EU to be stronger, especially in defence and foreign affairs, as this was a factor for peace. Mr Brendan HOWLIN, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, mentioned the need for diplomatic efforts to resolve this crisis.

Mr Aurelijus VERYGA, Lithuanian *Seimas*, stressed the need for the EU to be united in this crisis and spoke in favour of Ukraine's application to enter the European Union. Ms Etilda GJONAJ, Albanian *Kuvendi*, also said that the EU needed to be stronger and

more united to strengthen its strategic autonomy, recalling that Albania had joined all the measures taken against Russia.

Several speakers stressed the need to address the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Ms Susana SUMELZO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, called on the European Union to be more humane and to provide an economic and social response to this crisis. Mr Evangelos-Vasileios MEIMARAKIS, European Parliament, said that it was necessary to think about the most vulnerable in the face of the consequences of this crisis on the European economy.

Some speakers mentioned the importance of European initiatives and instruments. Mr Dario STEFANO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, said that the Conference on the Future of Europe was an opportunity to implement reforms of the Union and possibly revise the Treaties. He also referred to the Next Generation EU (NGEU) instrument, as a novel device to put an end to the taboo of common borrowing. Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, mentioned the New Pact on Migration and Asylum to indicate the importance of common instruments to manage the influx of migrants even in non-crisis situations.

Some speakers took advantage of the debate to mention their country's wish to join the Schengen area, namely Mr Ștefan MUȘOIU, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, and Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski Sabor*. Ms Etilda GJONAJ, Albanian *Kuvendi*, and Mr Arber ADEMI, North Macedonia *Kuvendi*, asked for the EU to make progress on the applications of their respective countries.

Mr Pyyrö NIEMI, Swedish *Riksdag*, spoke about the preparations for the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council, indicating that more than 300 meetings were planned across the country, half of which will take place in Stockholm, on topics such as forestry and energy.

Mr CASTEX took the floor again and thanked the speakers for their support of the French Presidency and of the unity of the EU. He recalled that the EU had the virtue of speeding up history, as shown by the example of the COVID vaccination. He mentioned the European recovery and resilience plans to address the economic and social consequences of the crisis, while stressing that these plans had enabled the EU to have some of the lowest unemployment rate in the world. The Prime Minister said that the issue of European defence was at stake. Governments should face crises as one.

Despite this crisis, the Prime Minister highlighted the importance of the other priorities of the French Presidency of the EU Council, namely energy transition, with the European carbon border adjustment mechanism, the social issues, in particular the directive on minimum wages, the digital market regulations, with in particular the fight against disinformation, and the topic of migration.

He noted that this crisis had revealed an ideological struggle: the EU's greatest strength was its values relating to the rule of law, multilateralism and democracy. The EU must be sovereign, uncompromising on these values in order to live free and in peace. He concluded by saying that the Union must be at the rendez-vous of history and that we must be together.

## **PROCEDURAL ISSUES AND ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Assemblée nationale*, opened the session by welcoming the delegations. She stressed that, more than remote meetings, face-to-face gatherings create a stronger bond between the national Parliaments. Ms THILLAYE has nevertheless deeply regretted that this collective emotion was darkened by the war in Ukraine.

She stated that COSAC was an irreplaceable forum for dialogue and cooperation between parliamentarians, who were the link between the territories and the European Union. She also pointed out that COSAC meetings allowed for its members to follow the most relevant EU issues at present: the agenda of the present meeting included sessions about the recovery and resilience plans, climate change and energetic transition, the Conference of the Future of Europe (CoFE) and the situation in Ukraine.

Finally, Ms THILLAYE welcomed Mr Anton HOFREITER, Chairman of the Committee on European Union Questions of the German *Bundestag*, Mr David SMOLJAK, Chairman of the European Affairs committee of the Czech *Sénat*, Ms Laura BROMET, Chair of the European affairs committee of the Dutch *Eerste Kaamer*, Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, Vice-Chair of the European affairs committee of the Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, and Mr Pyry NIEMI, Chairman of the European affairs committee of the Swedish *Riksdag*, who were attending the COSAC plenary meeting for the first time.

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chairman of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Sénat*, pointed out that the COSAC plenary meeting was organised only one month and a half after the Chairpersons meeting, which has been held in the the French *Sénat*. He stated that the presence of delegations in Paris showed their commitment to European democracy, to the expression of the will of the people and to dialogue, at a time when these values were being trampled on in Ukraine. He emphasized that the COSAC plenary meeting allowed all parliamentarians to face this war together. Mr RAPIN recalled that the French Presidency's slogan "Recovery, Strength and a Sense of Belonging" was still relevant, even in this context. According to him, the painful circumstances confirm the need to guarantee the strategic autonomy of the European Union, in the broadest sense, and reinforce the sense of belonging. Mr RAPIN concluded his speech by saying that it was necessary to prepare for the future, and

welcomed the discussions with all the speakers on all the important subjects on the COSAC plenary meeting agenda.

### **Presentation of the results of the meeting of the Presidential Troika of COSAC**

Ms THILLAYE presented the results of the Troika meeting, held on 4 March, including the decision of sending a letter from the COSAC Presidency to the EU institutions summarising the main issues of the debates held during the LXVII COSAC.

Furthermore, she underlined that the Troika had adopted a draft declaration on the situation in Ukraine that firmly condemned the Russian military aggression, called on Russia to allow humanitarian corridors, and also called for a ceasefire and an end to cyberattacks. This declaration invited the European Union to organise itself to receive Ukrainian refugees and to associate national Parliaments to the management of the crisis. The declaration affirmed the need to have a European defence and common security policy and to strengthen the European strategic autonomy. In connection with this declaration, Ms THILLAYE welcomed the presence of the Georgian delegation as an observer to the COSAC plenary meeting. Ms THILLAYE then informed that the declaration would be open for co-signature by the Presidents of all the delegations.

### **Presentation of the 37th Bi-Annual Report of COSAC**

Ms THILLAYE presented the 37th COSAC report drawn up by the COSAC Secretariat, and thanked all the national Parliaments and the European Parliament who contributed. The report was divided in three parts: the role of national Parliaments, the rule of law and the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The Chair then gave the floor to the Permanent Member of the COSAC Secretariat, Mr Bruno DIAS PINHEIRO, to present the report, who underlined that it was the first time, since 2019, that the COSAC plenary meeting was held in person. He thanked all of the delegations who responded on such short notice and emphasised that the COSAC Secretariat had analysed the results and drafted the report in ten days. Mr DIAS PINHEIRO expressed his hope that the findings of the report would contribute to the discussions during the COSAC plenary and shed light on the future debates, including within the remit of the two existing COSAC working groups

*A video presenting the highlights of the report was broadcasted.*

### **Any other business**

Ms THILLAYE informed that the Troika had decided to continue the informal exchanges with European personalities (e.g. Commissioners) via videoconference initiated by previous Presidencies, and would also organise a visit to the Court of Justice of the European Union. She underlined that this visit would be an opportunity to discuss with judges the ways in which the national constitutional identities were taken into



account in the work of the Court. She announced that further information about this visit would be given soon by the Presidency.

### **Letters received by the Presidency**

Ms THILLAYE also referred to the letters with requests to attend COSAC meetings from the Andorran *Conseil général*, the Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*, the Icelandic *Althingi*, the Kosovo<sup>1</sup> *Kuvendi i Kosovës*, the Monaco *Conseil national*, the Norwegian *Stortinget*, the United Kingdom *House of Lords*, the United Kingdom *House of Commons* and the Swiss *Assemblée fédérale*, and to the agreement the Presidency gave in response.

## **SESSION II – RECOVERY PLAN FOR EUROPE AND END OF CRISIS**

Keynote speakers: Mr Othmar KARAS, First Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Ivan STEFANEC, President of SME Europe (Small and medium sized enterprises Europe), Mr Daniel GROS, Distinguished Fellow and Member of the Board of CEPS (Centre for European Policy Studies)

Chair: Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*

Introduction: Mr. Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the Committee for European Affairs of the French *Sénat*

Mr RAPIN introduced the topic by saying that the recovery instrument, Next Generation EU (NGEU), completed the framework of financial instruments to combat the COVID-19 crisis and was a turning point in Europe's history. He then raised three points for discussion: 1) the conditions for the implementation of the Resilience and Recovery Facility (RRF), 2) the risk of bureaucracy and excessive control by the European Commission, 3) the reimbursement of the joint debt needing the new own resources. Mr RAPIN elaborated on the fact that the EU needed to move forward on this issue. Two of the new own resources, proposed in the initiative of the Commission from December 2021, were directly linked to the ongoing negotiations on the "Fit for 55" package. He highlighted that certain subjects, such as the extension of the emissions trading system, gave rise to debates and reservations, but he underlined the fact that the EU had to act in order to avoid a significant increase in the contributions of the Member States, and that the Commission had to produce the expected proposals, in accordance with the roadmap annexed to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 16 December 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Mr RAPIN continued by stressing that the war in Ukraine would have economic consequences. In this context he emphasised that it was crucial to move beyond the NGEU to meet the challenges of this new crisis and to enable the whole EU to undertake the necessary investments.

Mr Othmar KARAS held the first key-note speech, stressing that the recovery and resilience plans had not lost their importance and should be implemented fully. Therefore, they should not be weakened by the current crisis, as they would strengthen the position of the EU in the world. Mr KARAS emphasised that the European Semester had a role to play, but it was necessary to consider other crises than just the economic one. All these crises had economic, social and environmental impacts, and the EU Member States needed to work together to find solutions at the EU level, not just nationally. More steps would need to be taken jointly such as working on foreign security policy, common defence, social support for refugees etc.. He declared that the war was being used as a political instrument by Russia, adding that this unprovoked aggression brought the EU together to defend freedom, sovereignty, human rights and parliamentary democracy. He considered that these values needed to be implemented fully in order to meet the challenges, while adding that the EU's response to the situation in Ukraine was an example of Member States being able to take joint decisions and to stand united, mentioning for example the decision to impose the largest ever package of sanctions against Russia. However, he welcomed the prospect of further actions, alluding to the fact that the EU spent 60 billion EUR on Russian gas and oil in 2021 which was 10 percent more than Russian military spending. Thus the EU was, according to Mr KARAS, indirectly financing the current attack on Ukraine and making itself vulnerable to blackmail and an attack. In order to change this, long-term consequences need to be drawn. The NGEU marked a turning point in response to climate change and the pandemic, but the development of more and more ambitious projects would be necessary. In this respect, Mr KARAS expressed his hope that the Conference on the Future of Europe would ensure and set the bases for further integration. Furthermore, he emphasized that the EU needed new own resources, flawless implementation of the rule of law and democratic legitimacy for decisions.

Mr Ivan STEFANEC referred to the context of the worst economic downfall since World War II, noting that years 2020-2021 were very challenging for the SMEs, with up to 90% of SMEs experiencing difficulties. He mentioned that SMEs needed better access to financing, removal of bureaucratic burden and improved education, especially regarding digital technologies. Mr STEFANEC mainly highlighted the digital and environmental transition. Regarding digitalisation, he mentioned that the world was in the middle of a digital revolution - the digital sector would represent 25% of global economic activity in 2023. Living in an increasingly digital world, one would need to acquire digital skills. He also mentioned the need to complete the Digital Single Market, and underlined the 2030 targets - namely to improve the digital capabilities of SMEs and businesses, to improve digital infrastructure, and for 90% of businesses to acquire basic digital skills. He also stated that the environmental transition presented

opportunities for innovation and should also lead to less dependence on Russian gas and oil, given the war in Ukraine.

Mr Daniel GROS mentioned, in the context of the war in Ukraine, that the negative aspects of economic sanctions on Russia would fortunately have a limited impact on the EU, as exports to Russia represented only 5% of the EU's total export and a very small share of the GDP. On top of that, this drop would be counterbalanced by the increase of the military budget of the biggest economy – Germany. Like the preceding speaker, Mr GROS identified the need for less dependence on energy from Russia, adding that, given the situation, it was necessary to make difficult decisions in this respect. The EU's choice should be to use less energy. The two main priorities – green and digital transitions – were becoming more and more important. If the digital sector would be strengthened, it would not only be good for the EU's economy but also for security. Regarding the recovery and resilience plans, he emphasised that structural reforms could strengthen our economy.

Following the key-note speeches, 27 speakers took the floor to discuss the topic.

During the debate, support for Ukraine and condemnation of the Russian aggression were voiced in the light of developments in Eastern Europe. In the course of the debate, words of support for Ukraine and its refugees were very significant. There were mentions of the extraordinary solidarity and unity from the EU by helping Ukraine and its people and also about being united and decisively applying the sanctions (Ms Margit SUTROP, Estonian *Riigikogu*, Ms Isabel ONETO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Ms Konstantina GIANNAKOPOULOU, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*). Mr Joris BECKER, Dutch *Eerste Kamer*, invited all the delegates to support the Declaration on Ukraine prepared by the COSAC Presidential Troika.

Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, stated that Europe was in a dark hour facing tyranny and aggression. The EU needed to invest in its defence and to make hard choices. He used the German Government as an example for raising the defence funding. This had to be done, according to Mr KAIRIDIS, and in a coordinated way at the EU level to avoid duplication and to make it last.

Many speakers mentioned the need to modernize the EU countries' economies and to assure solid public finances which were the only basis for resilience in the times of crises. The economies of the EU Member States should return to healthy public financing (Ms Pia KAUMA, Finnish *Eduskunta*, Mr Matas MALDEIKIS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, Mr Igors PIMENOVS, Latvian *Saeima*). A recurrent aspect addressed was strategic autonomy of the EU and the need for independence in resources (Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, Ms Dolors MONTSERRAT, European Parliament, Mr Pere Joan PONS, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat*, Alessandro GIGLIO VIGNA, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*). Mr José María SANCHEZ, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, noted that the EU had to think about its energy mix because of its dependency on gas from Russia.

Thus a realistic and fair energy mix should be found and that could be done by focusing more on green resources. On top of that, Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, raised another topic - food production and the security of the food supply chains. He pointed out that Europe was dependent on imports of agricultural products even from Ukraine.

The NGEU and RRF were among the topics covered by the speakers, with emphasis on the importance of investments needed for the recovery (Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno Sabranie*, Ms Amel GACQUERRE, French *Sé debates*, Mr Bruno DIAS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Ms Lisa CHAMBERS, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*). Mr Rubén MORENO PALANQUES, Spanish *Senado*, declared that national Parliaments had a duty to oversee the implementation and planning of the mentioned funds. It should be assured that the implementation of the plans and allocation of the funds would effectively take into account the local and regional investment needs in the Member States. Mr Dario STEFANO, Italian *Senato*, drew attention to the fact that the recovery plan would end in 2027 and that the EU needed to start thinking about how to turn it into a long-term resilience and growth instrument. Ms Anca Dana DRAGU, Romanian *Senat*, noted that the RRF should now be updated in several directions – green energy, clear measures in order to secure the supply chain, and security.

The green and digital transitions were mentioned by a number of speakers, who emphasised their importance and also the fact that a significant amount of investments would be needed in order to accelerate them (Ms Christine THELLMANN, Romanian *Camera Deputaţilor*, Mr Pyry NIEMI, Swedish *Riksdagen*, Mr Pere Joan PONS, Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, Ms Amel GACQUERRE, French *Sé debates*).

Mr Ruairí Ó MURCHÚ, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, endorsed the idea of solidarity in which the state had a role to play. He emphasised the key importance of cyber security. He also asked for support regarding Irish unity.

From the side of non-EU countries, Ms Erzu ERDEM, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, condemned the Russian aggression and expressed support for Ukraine and its unity. She also mentioned that the EU had to face many crises (economic, pandemic, refugee) and that its long-term target should be to increase the crisis resilience capacity of the EU, but that could not be achieved without Turkey. Thus there should be deeper cooperation.

Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'I*, said that Ukrainian people were also fighting for Europe. She mentioned that Russia invaded Georgia in 2008 and it was regrettable another invasion by Russia could not be prevented. Furthermore, she emphasised the fact that Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova were applying for EU membership and appealed to not to keep Europe incomplete.

### **SESSION III – CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY TRANSITION**

Keynote speakers: Mr Werner HOYER, President of the European Investment Bank, Mr Pierre GATTAZ, President of Business Europe, and Mr Christian GOLLIER, Director General of Toulouse School of Economics and visiting Professor at the Collège de France

Chair: Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the Committee for European Affairs of the French *Sénat*

Introduction: Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*

Ms THILLAYE introduced the topic by saying that the war in Ukraine would inevitably have an impact on the discussions on climate and energy. She reminded the EU's goal to become climate neutral by 2050 and to reduce greenhouse gas emission by 55 percent by 2030, which would require the economy to be reinvented and consumers to change their habits. She specifically referred to the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and its importance for the European businesses to remain competitive and to the necessity for high public and private investments in climate neutrality.

Mr HOYER held the first key-note speech, starting with condemning the act of war against Ukraine and with confirming that the European Investment Bank (EIB) was working with its partners to unlock a support package of 2 billion euros to Ukraine, including immediate liquidity support of 700 million euros; he confirmed that the first funds would arrive within a couple of days in the bank accounts of the Ukrainian authorities. Mr HOYER also highlighted the support to be provided to neighbouring EU and non-EU countries for the welcoming of refugees and impacts on their economies. He also informed parliamentarians that he called an emergency meeting of the group of multilateral development banks in order to coordinate efforts across institutions.

In the long-term, Mr HOYER stressed that efforts would focus on accelerating investments in strategic autonomy, green energy and European technological leadership. He referred to the most far-reaching economic sanctions ever deployed by the EU, which proved that democracies could act quickly, forcefully and with resolve, but stressed that it was very important that the EU was also united and showed resolve in tackling all other challenges from economic stagnation, to climate change and the pandemic. He noted that the EU was falling behind and losing competitiveness in many fields and that investments were necessary in critical fields, such as the energy sector. He highlighted that the green transition should be seen as a solution and not a problem, for example the way renewable energy would increase the EU's independence. Mr HOYER stressed that EIB could help coordinate investments and incentivise the private sector to direct money to what would have the most impact within the framework of the EU priorities. He referred to examples such as the European battery alliance, the floating wind farms, or green hydrogen. The EIB President also reminded that 5.5

billion euros were invested in health and cutting-edge life science companies and EIB was proud to have played a role in supporting BioNTech, one of the companies capable of developing a COVID-19 vaccine. He finally stressed that climate, innovation and development should always go together and that the EU would fall short on its climate goals if it would only rely on existing technologies, if it would not bring on board other countries, and if it would not invest huge amounts of money (of around 350 billion euros until 2050) especially when knowing what was being spent by China and the USA. Mr HOYER targeted several sectors, such as semiconductors, where investment has been increased to €48 billion by 2050, and artificial intelligence, where investment needed to be increased fourfold to make Europe a leader in this field.

Mr GATTAZ also started his intervention by condemning the Russian invasion in Ukraine on behalf of Business Europe, expressing support for the Ukrainian people and for the sanctions taken by the EU and its partners even if these would lead to economic repercussions. He stressed that the debate in the times ahead would focus on the energy challenges, e.g. energy independence, security of gas, acceleration of renewable energy, strengthening of the European energy market. He spoke of an opportunity to combine climate ambition and energy transition, in particular the opportunity for the industry to produce the energies of tomorrow such as hydrogen, electric batteries, biofuels. According to a study, the international green market could hit between 1000 and 2000 billion euros by 2030. Mr GATTAZ noted that Business Europe shared the ambitions of the European Green Deal and insisted that its success depended on many factors, including the prosperity of businesses. He underlined three priorities towards achieving the European climate goals: to combine green transition and industrial competitiveness without curtailing innovation; to take measures in the global energy context, including national measures, in medium term to invest massively in renewable energy and in transition activities such as gas and nuclear, and in long-term to invest in breakthrough technologies, e.g. storage; finally to strengthen the European industrial basis, to have innovative and competitive businesses. Mr GATTAZ gave the example of France planning massive investments in order to become a leader in green hydrogen by 2030.

Mr GOLLIER underlined that the EU had fully understood the context and the dangers linked to the climate but although people in the society understood the challenge, some of them refused to make the required sacrifices. He stressed that it was an illusion to think that energy transition would create thousands of jobs and reduce electricity bills. With respect to the increase of gas prices he noted that these would probably only keep increasing in the coming months. He also noted that not everything green was socially desirable as some green actions would affect the purchasing power. He stressed that it was essential to have a price on carbon and that the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism should be carefully implemented. Mr GOLLIER also spoke about taxes as a tool and how fiscal revenue could be distributed, especially to the poorest households as compensation for losing purchasing power. He concluded by reminding of the crash in the markets and the significant drop of carbon prices in the EU's Emissions Trading System.

Following the key-note speeches, 28 speakers took the floor to discuss the topic.

A recurrent aspect addressed was how to achieve the EU's energy autonomy. Mr Nik PREBIL, Slovenian *Državni zbor*, noted that the crisis in Ukraine showed that the EU's economic autonomy was crucial and wished that the unity shown in the case of Ukraine should be also affirmed in the fight against climate change. Mr Antonio GÓMEZ-REINO, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, highlighted the need to ensure energy sovereignty and called for involving big companies and cooperating with business when working towards transition. Mr Domas GRIŠKEVIČIUS, Lithuanian *Seimas*, emphasised the need for the EU's energy independence while acknowledging that this would come with a high price which was worth paying, and he applauded private investors who refused to buy Russian oil although cheaper than from other providers. Ms Ana-Maria CĂTĂUȚĂ, Romanian *Camera Deputaților*, also warned that attention should be paid to energy security by making sure that EU populations do not suffer from any type of shortages. Ms Christiana EROKROITOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, called for the immediate development of healthy energy sources in the EU such as the liquid gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean and for the EU to give Cyprus the means to exploit those reserves, fostering independence from sources in third countries. Mr Tarmo KRUUSIMÄE and Mr Timo SUSLOV, Estonian *Riigikogu*, and Mr Ioan Sorin BUMB, Romanian *Senat*, urged for the need to become independent from Russian gas. Mr SUSLOV particularly welcomed the use of hydrogen technologies to this end, while calling for cooperation with the scientists and businesses in order to carry out this work. Mr BUMB called for finding viable solutions in green energy including nuclear energy. Mr Pedro CEGONHO, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, supported energy independence of the EU by diversifying the sources of supply and fostering greater cooperation among the EU countries. Mr Bojan KEKEC, Slovenian *Državni svet*, called parliamentarians to see climate change in light of the war in Ukraine and raised concerns about for example nuclear plants that could become strategic targets. He elaborated on the rich natural resources of Ukraine e.g. grains, natural gas, titan, and its high nuclear energy production.

A large number of speakers noted the rising energy prices and the impact on citizens and businesses. Ms Dolors MONTSERRAT, European Parliament, focused on the impact for employment and households and welcomed cooperation between Member States combining work on renewable, gas and nuclear energies and finding ways to compensate households so that the transition would leave nobody behind. Similarly, Mr Didier MARIE, French *Sénat*, stressed that the transition should be inclusive and pay attention to the citizens who should be involved as key stakeholders in the transition. Mr Gaëtan VAN GOIDSENHOVEN, Belgian *Sénat* also expressed concerns about the purchasing power of part of the community impacted by the rising energy prices and called the EU level and governments to address this. Both Mr Ľudovít GOGA, Slovak *Národná rada*, and Ms Barbara MASINI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, shared concerns about how to deal with the rise of energy prices and noted that natural gas and nuclear energy had to be part of the process towards transition. Ms Lucrezia Maria

Benedetta MANTOVANI, Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, amongst other things, called for safeguarding work in sectors that are affected by the green policies.

Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*, argued for importing liquid gas in Germany and building liquid gas terminals, while stressing that one could be more optimistic about using modern technological opportunities and renewable energy becoming a cheap basis for re-industrialization. Mr Domagoi HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, focused on how to adapt the common agricultural policy to green transition and spoke in favour of investments in renewable energy. Ms CĂȚĂUȚĂ reminded that Romania had a high share of renewable energy in the energy mix, namely 40 percent of electricity produced in Romania coming from renewable sources. Ms Satu HASSI, Finnish *Eduskunta*, noted that the EU was a global frontrunner in developing renewable energy technologies and that this enabled many countries to have the cheapest energy through wind and solar power. Ms HASSI also referred to the latest report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change on impacts, adaptation and vulnerabilities associated with the climate crisis. Mr Ruairí Ó MURCHÚ, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, while supporting the development of hydrogen and renewable energy strategies, called for the Member States to step in and offer mitigations.

Ms Liliana TANGUY, French *Assemblée nationale*, focused on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism as a priority for France, as a crucial tool for ensuring the competitiveness of the European businesses and also for encouraging third countries to be ambitious in this field. Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, agreed that action should be taken with respect to third countries and imports of products done in disregard of pollution and climate damage, underlining that no matter what Europe would do, the problem would not be solved if the rest of the world continued polluting. Mr Nik PREBIL, *Državni zbor slovene*, also stressed the need for other actors in the world to follow.

Mr Martin KINNUNEN, Swedish *Riksdag*, applauded the unity of Member States to fight climate change, but also expressed concerns about some of the Commission's proposals such as the Social Climate Fund and the land use and forestry proposals.

Mr Paulo MONIZ, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, concentrated in his intervention on the difficult situation for islands, especially in outermost EU regions, to achieve energy independence especially given the crisis in Ukraine.

From the side of non-EU countries, Mr Mehmet Sait KIRAZOĞLU, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, and Mr Bjarni JÓNSSON, Icelandic *Althingi*, confirmed their countries commitment to the Paris Agreement goals. Mr David SONGULASHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*, noted the possibility for the EU to use Georgia as a hub in the Black Sea and connecting lines in order to reduce dependence from Russian energy resources. Mr Charles KINNOULL, UK *House of Lords*, underlined the need to



accelerate the green transition and reduce dependency on Russian gas as a matter of urgency. He also welcomed the Glasgow Climate Pact.

In his concluding remarks, Mr GOLLIER applauded the unanimity of the COSAC plenary in favour of the European ambition for green transition. He elaborated, in particular, on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism as a type of strategy to reduce costs for citizens and businesses able to deal with the environmental dumping being committed by certain countries who have no climate ambitions. He highlighted the importance of EU's energy security and noted that economists have defended free markets for far too long, but independence, taking into account risk management, needed to have value, as well as energy security, as means to fight climate change and to protect the purchasing power of households.

#### **SESSION IV – CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE (CoFE)**

Keynote speakers: Mr Guy VERHOFSTADT, Member of the European Parliament, Co-Chair of the Executive Board of the CoFE, Ms Dubravka ŠUICA, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography, Co-Chair of the Executive Board of the CoFE

Chair: Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Assemblée nationale*

Introduction: Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the Committee for European Affairs of the French *Sénat*

In his introductory remarks, Mr RAPIN reminded that the purpose of the Conference on the Future of Europe was to make the voice of European citizens heard. At the same time, he emphasised that also the national Parliaments represented their citizens and it was their duty to find out what were their expectations from the EU as well as their concerns and doubts. Therefore, it was very important that the national Parliaments have been involved in the discussions within the working groups and the Conference plenary since the very beginning. He also hoped that COSAC could contribute to this debate and that the work of the Parliaments/Chambers in this regard would go beyond.

Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN, President of the European Commission, greeted delegations via a prerecorded video message in which she referred to the current developments in Ukraine stating that the EU's response to this crisis could rewrite the future of Europe. Therefore, it was even more important than ever to listen to European citizens which was also the substance of the Conference on the Future of Europe. According to Ms VON DER LEYEN, this Conference proved to be an efficient way to connect with people who had never engaged with Europe, people of all ages from all spheres of life. It was an unprecedented experiment in European democracy. She summarized that the citizens had already expressed their views on many diverse topics

through the European citizens' panels. These recommendations would be now discussed by the Conference plenary, where national Parliaments also have a say. Ms VON DER LEYEN also reassured COSAC that the European institutions were ready to follow up on the Conference proposals but also to learn from them, because "we have to keep in mind that Europe is us".

Member of the European Parliament and Co-Chair of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe, Mr Guy VERHOFSTADT, addressed the plenary with a strong appeal for more European unity and more support for Ukrainian people, including stronger measures against Russian autocratic regime, referring to the recent events in Ukraine and their historical connotations. He added that even the Conference on the Future of Europe should react to this and come up with concrete and ambitious conclusions, not with a vague declaration adopted on 9 May lacking further steps and actions. The result should be a strong political act, namely a Convention or a Congress to discuss the refounding of the European project, based on the recommendations of the Conference. In this context, Mr VERHOFSTADT emphasised that up to date, the citizens had come up with 178 recommendations in four discussion panels, including for example the establishment of joint armed forces of the EU, cancelling of unanimity in certain policy areas, creating a union of energy and a health union, a better understanding of the role of the EU institutions, e.g., that the European Commission could be called the Executive Commission of the European Union, a stronger role for national Parliaments, introduction of transnational voting lists, an improved migration policy or a permanent mechanism for citizens' participation in the European decision-making process. He stressed that all of them should be taken very seriously in order to solve the current weaknesses of Europe as soon as possible, so that the EU can become a real global player. The European Parliament and the national Parliaments should act as a driving force of this process.

In her opening speech, Ms Dubravka ŠUIČA, Vice-President of the European Commission for Democracy and Demography and Co-Chair of the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe, fully supported the words of previous speakers on Ukraine and confirmed that the Conference on the Future of Europe was here right on time as the events in Ukraine also speak to our collective future. She stressed that the Conference was a celebration of European values based on lively exchange across borders, languages, different cultures and histories, so that no one was left behind. The intention was to bring Europe closer to the citizens, who are at the heart of this project, and to better reflect their thoughts and needs wherever they choose to live or work. Therefore, the Commission would make sure that their voice would be heard and that they would feel included in the final deliberations. At the same time Ms ŠUIČA emphasized that the Conference did not aim at replacing representative democracy, but the opposite – it should reinforce it. Its conclusions have to be taken very seriously by all the parties involved and include swift follow-up actions. To underline their importance, Ms ŠUIČA highlighted the idea of subsequent validation of plenary deliberations by the citizens' ambassadors.

During the ensuing debate, 34 speakers took the floor. A large majority of them expressed their support to Ukraine and strongly condemned Russian activities on its territory. A significant number of them, including Ms Constance LE GRIP, French *Assemblée Nationale*, Ms Margit SUTROP, Estonian *Riigikogu*, or Mr Constantinos EFSTATHIOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, also agreed on the need of more severe approach towards Russia as the sanctions adopted until now proved not to be efficient enough. Furthermore, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, pleaded for the confiscation of foreign monetary reserves and assets emphasizing that Russia should pay for the damages caused to Ukrainian people. Some of the delegates, such as Mr Peter KMEC, Slovak *Národná rada*, or Mr Jouni OVASKA, Finish *Eduskunta*, appreciated the efforts of the French Presidency in this regard.

In this context, several speakers referred to the recent Ukrainian request for EU membership. A number of them, including Mr Peter KMEC, Slovak *Národná rada*, Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, Mr Seán HAUGHEY, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, or Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, agreed that Ukraine should be granted the status of candidate country as soon as possible, but the same conditions should apply also to Georgia and Moldova. The representatives of Croatian *Hrvatski sabor* (Mr Davor Ivo STIER, Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ and Mr Bojan GLAVASEVIĆ) recalled many years of efforts of the Western Balkan countries that seem to be forgotten now. They asked to be very cautious in this regard and if possible to revise and accelerate the EU enlargement policy in general and not just towards certain third countries. This idea was explicitly supported also by Mr Peter KMEC, Slovak *Národná rada*, or by Mr Seán HAUGHEY, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*. Mr Kreshnik ÇOLLAKU, Albanian *Kuvendi*, warned that the anti-European moods were increasing in the region and therefore the EU should not hesitate anymore with opening the EU accession negotiations. Mr Ettore Anton LICHERI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, called for a larger support of all the countries neighbouring the EU and Russia which was demanded also by Ms Maka BOTCHORISHVILI, Georgian *Sakartvelos p'arlament'i*.

As for the project of the Conference on the Future of Europe itself, a number of speakers pointed out that the challenges to address had fundamentally changed. Furthermore, Mr David SMOLJAK, Czech *Senát*, stressed that the future of Europe did not happen anymore in the scope of this Conference, but on Ukrainian soil. Therefore, the EU should now focus on really important questions, such as resilience, energy, industrial and food supply independence, strategic autonomy, internal security, functional and just migration and asylum system and coherence and stability in the area of Common Foreign and Security Policy. This idea was strongly supported, among others, by Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, Mr Georgios KOUMOUTSAKOS and Mr Ioannis BOURNOUS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, Mr Kristian VIGENIN, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, or Ms Marina NIKOLAOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, about migration. Regarding the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, Mr Peter KMEC, Slovak *Národná rada*, proposed a move towards qualified majority voting in order for it to become more efficient. Mr Seán HAUGHEY,

Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, called for progress in the area of defence, namely the adoption of the Strategic Compass and the European Peace Facility. Moreover, Mr Ettore Anton LICHERI, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, supported the idea of creating the European Army. In this context, Mr Helmut BRANDSTÄTTER, Austrian *Nationalrat*, warned against the rise of nationalist sentiments.

Beyond the reflection of the situation in Ukraine, many speakers, including for example Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, Mr Othmar KARAS, European Parliament, or Mr Thomas HACKER, German *Bundestag*, expressed their agreement with the words of Mr VERHOFSTADT and Ms ŠUICA that the Conference should come up with balanced and ambitious conclusions, with the guarantee of careful and regular evaluation of the actions taken by the EU institutions. Ms Roelien KAMMINGA, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, highlighted the importance of transparency of the whole process. Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, stressed that the result of the Conference must be complete reconsideration of the European project in order to correspond more to the current challenges. Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Romanian *Senat*, recommended that the approach should be more pragmatic and focused on the progress to be made in the various policy areas, rather than on the institutional aspects. Mr Anti POOLAMETS, Estonian *Riigikogu*, opposed any possible change of the Treaties and asked for a greater respect to the subsidiarity principle and to the sovereignty of each Member State.

The question of subsidiarity was also addressed by Mr Nacho SÁNCHEZ AMOR, European Parliament, who stated that the early warning mechanism did not work. He believed that the EU should abandon this concept and focus on activities that have a real impact, political dialogue included.

Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, Austrian *Nationalrat*, noted that the dialogue with citizens, and especially with young people, must not end. He highlighted the idea of introducing a permanent mechanism for participation of citizens in the European decision-making process, as was suggested by one of the European citizens' panels, as well as a greater role for national Parliaments, including the green card mechanism. In this context, he also welcomed the creation of a COSAC working group devoted to this topic.

Mr Kim VALENTIN, Danish *Folketing*, noted that the involvement of national Parliaments should not be limited to scrutinising the European Commission's proposals. He suggested that the Parliaments/Chambers could be actively involved already in the preparatory phase, in the form of preliminary consultations and that their positions could be then summarised in the explanatory memorandum of the relevant proposal.

In addition to that, Mr Sergio BATTELLI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, appreciated the common understanding between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament regarding the scope of the Conference. Also, Mr Gunther KRICHBAUM, German *Bundestag*, thanked Ms ŠUICA for always being on the side of national Parliaments. On the other hand, Ms Mariona ILLAMOLA, Spanish *Cortes Generales*, expressed certain

doubts about the whole concept of the Conference, especially the fact that the regional parliaments had not been involved. Similar criticism came from Ms Sibel OZOEMIR, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, who was not happy with excluding the candidate countries from this exercise, or Ms Simonida KOROIC, Montenegro *Skupština*, on the Western Balkan countries.

Finally, some delegates, including Mr Igors PIMENOVŠ, Latvian *Saeima*, Ms Jessika ROSWALL, Swedish *Riksdag*, or Ms Roelien KAMMINGA, Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, raised concerns about the heavy ongoing process of producing the final report of the Conference as well as a very short time frame for delivering the results that correspond to the promises made. Mr PIMENOVŠ added that the Conference should continue even after the closing event on 9 May 2022.

In his replies, Mr VERHOFSTADT thanked for the vast support expressed by the participants and repeated his strong commitment to deliver. He stressed that the citizens could not leave this project with the impression that it was for nothing. They would need to see concrete actions. To achieve this, he highlighted the need for good cooperation between the national Parliaments and the European Parliament. Therefore, he informed about the preparation of a joint position document to be confirmed by both components on 24 March 2022, which would be then transmitted to all the Members of the Conference plenary. Regarding the Western Balkan countries, Mr VERHOFSTADT assured that the Co-Chairs strived for their involvement since the very beginning and that they would continue in these efforts within the discussions on their accession to the EU.

In her concluding remarks, Ms ŠUIČA thanked for all the contributions and stressed that the work of the EU institutions would not stop on 9 May 2022, since they will then have more than two years, until the end of the Commission's mandate, to implement the deliberations of the Conference. She also confirmed that the war in Ukraine made the institutions think a bit different and faster, which is something the Union needed. Now the most important thing is not to disappoint the citizens.

## **SESSION V – PROGRESS REPORTS FROM THE WORKING GROUPS**

Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Assemblée nationale*, began the session by informing that the work of working groups (WG) was progressing well and thanked all of those who dedicated their time to this endeavour. She stated that there were 42 members participating in the WG on the role of national Parliaments and 44 members participating in the WG on European values. So far, two meetings had been held per WG — a first one for a general debate between members and a second dedicated to hearing from experts. Ms THILLAYE announced that each WG would have six to eight meetings in total with the final one, on 14 June 2022, being held in person in Paris. She further presented the activities of the WG on

the sense of belonging and underlined its focus on the identification of European values, including societal values. In relation to that, Ms THILLAYE emphasised two aspects: the importance of a common understanding of values like democracy and/or rule of law and their respect within the European Union.

Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Sé debates*, stated that COSAC had an important role to play within the European Union and that the WGs additionally strengthened relations between parliamentarians. He discussed the issue of the legitimacy and of the democratic deficit of the European Union and underlined that the WG on the role of national Parliaments had focused so far on creating a more democratic Europe and on promoting the legitimacy of national Parliaments.

Mr RAPIN furthermore outlined some priorities based on the initial discussions in the WG: the first one is the need for the improvement of European policy monitoring by national Parliaments. He also said that obstacles at the European level, like a lack of transparency in the work of the Council, namely with regard to trilogues, impede this monitoring work and should be tackled. Mr RAPIN also mentioned a second topic, namely interparliamentary cooperation, which must be made more effective. Finally, he highlighted a third priority: the role that national Parliaments can play directly at the European level. Mr RAPIN indicated that there should be a richer debate and closer work with the European Commission, in order to influence the European Commissions' proposals. Furthermore, he pointed out the fact that the monitoring of compliance with the principle of subsidiarity should also evolve. This mechanism was clearly not working: only three yellow cards had been adopted in almost 15 years, with very limited consequences. Mr RAPIN also welcomed the idea of implementing a right of initiative for national Parliaments and stated that the Conference on the Future of Europe was a great opportunity to highlight this issue. He also said that he had sent a contribution to the members of the WG on this subject, for the principle not to be only discussed, but the work on this mechanism actually triggered. According to Mr RAPIN, this mechanism should be based on the model of the right of indirect initiative of the European Parliament. To ensure that this right does not remain a dead letter, he said that the triggering threshold should be reasonable: for example, 25% of the votes of the national Parliaments or 25% of the population of the Union, the latter condition being associated with a minimum number of Member States. He mentioned that some people would worry that this could make the European institutional system more complex, but said that we should not be afraid of democracy.

Mr RAPIN emphasised that the work on national Parliaments' role should focus on the control of the EU institutions to ensure better cooperation at the European level. He underlined that some national parliamentarians - and COSAC collectively - should have the possibility to address written questions to the European Commission. With that regard, he alluded to the contribution sent by the French *Sé debates* in the framework of the WG on the role of national Parliaments.

## SESSION VI – DEBATE ON UKRAINE

Chair: Mr Jean-François RAPIN, Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the French *Sénat*

Introduction: Ms Sabine THILLAYE, Chair of the Committee on European Affairs of the French *Assemblée nationale*

Ms THILLAYE initially welcomed the fact that the war in Ukraine was unanimously condemned by all the EU member states. She underlined how fragile peace in Europe was once again and called for continued support of Ukraine to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity. She noted the rapid EU institutional response to the crisis, in coordination with its allies and partners and outlined the implementation of sanctions and the protection of refugees as the two main challenges lying ahead. In this regard, she also stressed the need to prolong the already existing measures that had been in place since the annexation of Crimea. She furthermore stated that the Russian aggression would require a new European strategy and referred to the role of the Strategic Compass, which the European Council will discuss on 24 March 2022. In the end, she stated that this crisis would deeply affect EU citizens and therefore also national Parliaments, which was why their direct involvement in decision-making to manage this crisis was of crucial importance. She also thanked all the delegations for signing the Statement in support of the Ukraine attacked by the Russian Federation at the invitation of the Troika.

Following these introductory remarks, 29 speakers took the floor, unanimously expressing condemnation for the Russian invasion in Ukraine and support for the united EU response and imposition of tough sanctions on the Russian Federation and Belarus. The vast majority underlined that Ukraine was not only fighting for its freedom and sovereignty but also for Europe's values and security.

Mr Ruairí Ó MURCHU, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, commended the bravery of Ukrainians and emphasized the need to offer help and protection to everyone affected by the war. Similarly, Ms Vladimíra MARCINKOVÁ, Slovak *Národná rada*, and Mr Angel TÎLVĂR, Romanian *Senat*, expressed concerns about the current situation at their borders with Ukraine and assured their respective countries were doing everything possible to help Ukrainian refugees. Together with Sergio BATELLI, Italian *Camera dei deputati*, they called for a common EU solution to deliver humanitarian help faster and more efficiently. Ms MARCINKOVÁ further mentioned the recently passed legislation on temporary protection of Ukrainians, that enables them to work, study and receive health insurance in Slovakia. Also, in relation to that, Othmar KARAS, European Parliament, thanked the civil societies for all their work in helping the Ukrainian refugees.

The majority of speakers also expressed support for further sanctions against the Russian Federation and Belarus, with Mr Anton HOFREITER, German *Bundestag*,

calling for an imposition of sanctions on fossil fuels from Russia. Related to this, Mr Luís CAPOULAS SANTOS, Portuguese *Assembleia da República*, expressed the need for more coordinated work on this with allies and partners, with Mr BATELLI, Mr Ondřej BENEŠÍK, Czech *Poslanecká sněmovna*, and Mr Davor STIER, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, specifically mentioning more cooperation was needed with the US and the UK. Mr Dario STEFANO, Italian *Senato della Repubblica*, and Mr Johannes KOSKINEN, Finnish *Eduskunta*, also emphasized the need for continued diplomatic efforts to achieve a peaceful solution, with Mr KOSKINEN calling for the EU to enhance its global diplomatic outreach for a wider condemnation of the Russian aggression at the UN level.

Several members touched upon the Ukrainian European perspective. Mr Domagoj HAJDUKOVIĆ, Croatian *Hrvatski sabor*, welcomed the prospects of a future Ukrainian membership, with Mr Igors PIMENOVŠ, Latvian *Saeima*, Ms Riina SIKKUT, Estonian *Riigikogu*, and Ms Denitsa SIMEONOVA, Bulgarian *Narodno sabranie*, clearly emphasizing the need for the EU to grant Ukraine candidate status. In relation to this, Mr TÎLVĂR called for an increased cooperation on EU enlargement with Eastern Partnership countries, while Mr BENEŠÍK noted the EU should not forget about the European perspective of the Western Balkans. In reference to this, Mr Fridon LALA, Kosovo<sup>2</sup> *Kuvendi i Kosovës*, noted the overall deterioration of the situation in the Western Balkans and expressed concern about the Russian influence in the region, especially in Serbia.

Proposals were also made for greater strategic autonomy and strengthened cooperation on security and defense. To this end, Mr STEFANO and Mr TÎLVĂR welcomed the establishment of the European Peace Facility and called for its continued use and development. Mr Seán HAUGHEY, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, expressed the need to finalize the Strategic Compass for the EU to jointly achieve its objectives and Mr Nacho SÁNCHEZ AMOR, European Parliament, pointed out the need for more joint EU intelligence capabilities for external crises. Mr KOSKINEN also stated that Finland had started to look closely into prospects of a future membership in NATO. In addition, Mr HOFREITER stressed that challenges of strategic autonomy were even more acute in the energy sector, with Ms SIKKUT agreeing that energy independence should be at the top of EU's priorities.

Both Mr Reinhold LOPATKA, the Austrian *Nationalrat*, and Mr Seán HAUGHEY, Irish *Houses of the Oireachtas*, reassured that, despite Austria and Ireland being military neutral, they firmly support all the EU measures against Russia. Mr Benedikt WÜRTH, Swiss *Assemblée fédérale*, added that Switzerland had also strongly condemned the Russian aggression and adopted restrictive measures in coordination with the EU. Similarly, Mr Charles KINNOUL, UK *House of Lords*, welcomed the attendance of the

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<sup>2</sup> This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.



UK Foreign Secretary at the EU extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council meeting held on 5 March and expressed hope such cooperation would continue.

Ms Christiana EROTKRITOU, Cyprus *Vouli ton Antiprosopon*, also referred to the Cyprus question and stated that if the EU would not respond to the Russian aggression decisively, this trend of aggressions would continue. Mr Dimitris KAIRIDIS, Greek *Vouli ton Ellinon*, also posed a question regarding the perceived vague position of Turkey concerning the Russian invasion in Ukraine, to which Mr Arzu ERDEM, Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi*, responded that Turkey remains firmly on the side of international peace and security.

## **CLOSING SESSION**

Ms THILLAYE alluded to the relevance of the debates held and referred to some concrete initiatives that could be implemented to gather information and best practice on the ways Parliaments are dealing with the current international crisis. She mentioned a few figures in the field of defence, namely the fact that the EU currently had 2,5 million soldiers whereas the United States of America had only 2,1 million but a strike force seven times superior to the European one. She supported the idea that parliamentarians should advocate for the interoperability of armed forces across the EU, with common intelligence and threat analysis. With regard to the support to refugees from Ukraine, Ms THILLAYE proposed that each Parliament/Chamber would identify the national needs in terms of support to this challenge, with special emphasis for those that have borders with Ukraine, suggesting that the COSAC Secretariat could gather this information and make it available.

Finally, both Mr RAPIN and Ms THILLAYE have thanked all the participants for the debates, and the COSAC Secretariat and all the staff for its support in the organisation of this meeting.